

IN THE CLAIMS

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1. (Currently Amended) A computer-implemented method comprising:
receiving a set of product attributes denoting a customer's desired product
configuration and flexibility constraints corresponding to one or more of the product
attributes;

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automatically transmitting an automatically prepared request for quote (RFQ) to
an automatically selected set of sellers, the RFQ including at least a subset of the received
set of product attributes; and

notifying the requesting customer upon receipt of quotes in response to the
transmitted RFQ.

2.-29. (Canceled) ✓

30. (Original) A method according to claim 1, wherein receiving the set of
product attributes comprises:

providing a customer with a graphical user interface (GUI) at an accessible
computing system, the GUI comprising one or more modifiable fields and/or pull-down
menus through which the customer can selectively assemble the set of product attributes
associated with a desired product configuration.

31. (Original) A method according to claim 30, wherein the GUI enables a
customer to rank each attribute of the set of attributes in accordance with their relative
importance to the customer.

32. (Original) A method according to claim 1, further comprising:
querying one or more electronic databases of existing product configurations to
determine whether a product representing the received set of product attributes is
available.

33. (Original) A method according to claim 32, further comprising:
receiving a response to the query that a product with the requested set of attributes
is not available; and
providing the customer with an indication that the set of attributes is not available.

34. (Original) A method according to claim 33, further comprising:
identifying one or more available product configurations that meet at least a
subset of the received set of attributes from the electronic database; and
prompting the customer with an opportunity to select one or more of the identified
product configurations with which to generate the RFQ.

35. (Original) A method according to claim 32, wherein the electronic
database contains information from product manufacturers regarding the available set of
product configurations.

36. (Original) A method according to claim 35, wherein at least a subset of
the electronic database(s) are managed by the product manufacturers.

37. (Original) A method according to claim 35, wherein at least a subset of the electronic database(s) are populated with product availability information from one or more sellers.

38. (Original) A method according to claim 1, wherein transmitting the RFQ comprises:

confirming that a product representing the received set of product attributes is manufactured;

generating the RFQ using the received set of product attributes, if available; and

selecting a subset of sellers from the plurality of sellers to which the generated RFQ is transmitted based, at least in part, on user attribute(s) associated with the requesting customer.

39. (Original) A method according to claim 38, wherein the user attribute(s) include one or more of a geographic location of the customer, shipping preferences of the customer, and/or delivery location(s) of the customer.

40. (Original) A method according to claim 38, wherein selection of the subset of sellers is based, at least in part, on seller attribute(s).

41. (Original) A method according to claim 40, wherein seller attribute(s) include one or more of a geographic location of the seller, product availability, product affiliation, and/or prior sales performance history of the seller.

42. (Original) A method according to claim 38, further comprising:
generating the RFQ using a modified set of product attributes if the received set of attributes are not available.

43. (Original) A method according to claim 1, wherein notifying the customer comprises:

receiving one or more quotes from sellers in response to the transmitted RFQ;
identifying one or more of the received quotes that meet a largest subset of the set of product attributes and a largest subset of user attributes; and
transmitting the identified one or more quotes to the customer.

44. (Original) A method according to claim 43, wherein transmitting the identified quote(s) comprises one or more of sending an electronic mail (eMail) message including at least a subset of the quote(s) to the customer, faxing at least a subset of the quote(s) to the customer, and/or providing a customer computing device with instructions to generate a graphical user interface including at least a subset of the received quote(s).

45. (Original) A method according to claim 1, wherein notifying the customer is performed using one or more of a telephone, electronic mail (eMail) message and/or a facsimile transmission.

46. (Original) A method according to claim 1, further comprising:
receiving an indication of acceptance of at least one of the received quotes from the customer; and
notifying a seller associated with the accepted quote of the acceptance to facilitate purchase of the product.

47. (Original) A method according to claim 46, wherein notifying the seller associated with the accepted quote is performed using one or more of a telephone, electronic mail (eMail) message and/or a facsimile transmission.

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48. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the received set of product attributes are received from an intermediary on behalf of the requesting customer, wherein the ~~authenticated buyer~~ intermediary provides an indication, either explicit or implicit, that the customer has funds available to complete the purchase.

49. (Original) A method according to claim 48, wherein the intermediary is the customer.

50. (Original) A method according to claim 48, wherein the intermediary is one of a banking institution, lending institution, product representative associated with a manufacturer of the product, and/or a re-seller of the product.

51. (Canceled) ✓

52. (Original) A method according to claim 1, further comprising:
tracking a status of the transmitted RFQ's to selectively provide a customer with an update of the status of their request.

53. (Original) A method according to claim 52, wherein the update is selectively provided on at least one of a periodic basis, upon a request from the customer, and/or upon receipt of status notifications received from one or more of the seller(s).

54. (Original) A method according to claim 1, wherein the product is an automobile, and the seller(s) are individual automobile dealers.

55. (Original) A storage medium comprising a plurality of machine executable instructions which, when executed by an accessing machine, cause the machine to implement a method according to claim 1.

56. (Currently Amended) A computing system comprising:
a memory system having stored therein a plurality of executable instructions; and

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a processor system, coupled to the memory system, to access and execute at least a subset of the plurality of executable instructions to enable the computing system to receive a desired set of product attributes from a requesting customer and flexibility constraints corresponding to one or more of the product attributes, to automatically transmit a request for quote (RFQ) dynamically generated from the received set of product attributes to an automatically selected set of sellers, and to notify the requesting customer of the receipt of one or more quotes in response to the transmitted RFQ's.

57. (Original) A computing system according to claim 56, further comprising instructions to transmit executable instructions to a customer accessible computing device to provide the customer with a graphical user interface (GUI), the GUI comprising one or more modifiable fields and/or pull-down menus through which the customer can selectively assemble the set of product attributes associated with a desired product configuration.

58. (Original) A computing system according to claim 57, wherein the GUI includes field(s) to enable the customer to rank each attribute of the set of attributes in accordance with their relative importance to the customer.

59. (Original) A computing system according to claim 56, further comprising instructions to query one or more electronic databases of existing product configurations to determine whether a product representing the received set of product attributes is available.

60. (Original) A computing system according to claim 59, further comprising instructions to provide the customer with an indication that the requested set of attributes is not available upon receiving a negative response to the query.

61. (Original) A computing system according to claim 60, further comprising instructions to identify one or more available product configurations that meet at least a subset of received set of attributes, and to prompt the customer with an opportunity to select the identified product configuration(s) with which to generate the RFQ(s).

62. (Original) A computing system according to claim 56, wherein the instructions to transmit the RFQ includes instructions to confirm that a product representing the received set of product attributes is available, generate the RFQ using the received set of attributes, and to select a subset of sellers from the plurality of sellers based, at least in part, on user attribute(s) associated with the requesting customer.

63. (Original) A computing system according to claim 62, wherein the user attribute(s) include one or more of a geographic location of the customer, shipping preferences of the customer, and/or a delivery location of the customer.

64. (Original) A computing system according to claim 62, wherein selection of the subset of sellers is based, at least in part, on seller attribute(s).

65. (Original) A computing system according to claim 64, wherein seller attribute(s) include one or more of a geographic location of the seller, product availability, product affiliation, and/or prior sales performance history of the seller.

66. (Original) A computing system according to claim 65, further comprising instructions to develop a sales performance history of a seller based, at least in part, on prior transactions.

67. (Original) A computing system according to claim 62, further comprising instructions to generate the RFQ using a modified set of product attributes if a product representing the received set of attributes are not available.

68. (Original) A computing system according to claim 56, wherein the instructions to notify the customer comprise instructions to receive one or more quotes from seller(s) in response to the transmitted RFQ, to identify one or more of the received quotes that meet a largest subset of the set of product attributes and a largest subset of user attributes, and to transmit identified quote(s) to the customer.

69. (Original) A computing system according to claim 56, further comprising instructions to receive an indication of acceptance from the customer of at least one of the received quote(s), and to notify the seller associated with the accepted quote of the acceptance to facilitate purchase of the product.

70. (Original) A computing system according to claim 56, further comprising instructions to indicate on the RFQ that the set of attributes was received from a customer through an authenticated buyer.

71. (Original) A computing system according to claim 56, further comprising instructions to track a status of the transmitted RFQ's, and to selectively provide a customer with an update of the status of their request.